

Food safety outdoors

Food poisoning is a real risk when taking food outside the home. Taking food out of its regular environment such as the fridge, freezer, pantry or clean kitchen for long periods of time can mean a greater risk of contamination. Take extra care with packed lunches for work and school, picnics and eating outdoors, especially in warm weather.

Eating outdoors can increase the risks of food poisoning

Eating outdoors is a great way to enjoy the Australian climate, but it can bring added risks because:

- Bacteria grow more easily when food is stored in the 'temperature danger zone' of between 5°C and 60°C.
- Facilities for cleaning and hand washing may be inadequate, and clean water is not always available.
- Food can be exposed to contamination from insects, pests and animals.

High risk foods

Food poisoning bacteria grow more easily on some foods than others. These 'high risk' foods include:

- Meat
- Poultry such as chicken and turkey
- Dairy products
- Eggs
- Smallgoods such as hams and salamis
- Seafood
- Cooked rice
- Cooked pasta
- Prepared salads like coleslaws, pasta salads and rice salads
- Prepared fruit salads.

Some people are at greater risk

Some people are more at risk of getting food poisoning than others. Vulnerable groups include pregnant women, the elderly, young children and anyone with an illness. Special care should be taken with their food.

Home barbeques and outdoor cooking

Some practical hints for keeping food safe to eat when you have a barbeque at home are:

- Keep the meat in the fridge until you are ready to start cooking.
- Store raw meats and poultry separate from cooked items, and underneath other food so that raw juices do not contaminate other food.
- Food should be cooked to at least 75°C. Use a meat thermometer to check the final temperature.
- Cook poultry until the meat is white – there should be no pink flesh.
- Cook hamburgers, mince, sausages and other meats right through until any juices run clear.
- Thoroughly cook any food made from eggs.
- Use a clean plate for all cooked meats; don't re-use the same plate or container that held raw meats.
- Salads, pates, dips and other perishables should only be brought outside when required and then returned to the fridge when that part of the meal is finished.
- Throw out any high risk food left in the temperature danger zone for more than four hours. Don't put it in the fridge and don't leave it for later.
- Cover food and keep birds, insects and animals away from it.

See over ...

Preparing food for a picnic or packed lunches

When planning a picnic, making packed lunches or preparing for any other occasion where you are eating away from home, be aware of the basic food safety rule – keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. You should also:

- Store any raw meat in an insulated cooler, away from other food.
- Cut and prepare all meats and salads beforehand to reduce the need to handle foods when you are outdoors.
- Place containers with raw meat or other high risk foods into separate leak-proof containers and then into a cooler.
- Make sure all cooked foods are completely cooled before you pack them in the cooler.
- Use plenty of ice or cold packs around the food. Frozen drinks can serve as icepacks, especially in packed school lunches.
- Travel with the cooler on the floor of the car, out of sunlight. Cover cooler with a blanket for extra insulation.

Camping tips

Perishable foods are generally unsuitable for camping unless you have access to a fridge. It is best to use dry, UHT and canned products. Other tips for camping include:

- If you want to take some meat with you, frozen meats can be stored in a cooler for up to two days and pre-cooked meals, such as frozen stews, for up to one day.
- Cover the cooler with a wet bag to promote evaporative cooling.
- Divide the food into meal size portions and pack it according to when you plan to eat it so that you can get what you need quickly.
- Make sure you cook or heat all food well, to at least 75°C.
- Boil drinking water before use, or use disinfecting tablets.

General cleanliness tips

Cleanliness is always important, but it's especially important when you're preparing food outside the home. Remember to:

- Wash your hands before and after handling raw foods. Wash your hands with clean water and soap, and dry hands with clean towels or disposable towels.
- Consider using disposable wipes if there is no safe water.
- Keep the outdoor area or campsite as clean as possible.
- Keep food sealed and covered; birds, insects and animals can be a source of food poisoning bacteria.

Where to get help

- Food Safety Hotline Tel. 1300 364 352, Email: foodsafety@dhs.vic.gov.au
- Your local council health department.

Things to remember

- Always keep perishable foods well refrigerated until needed.
- Avoid handling food in the outdoors by cutting or preparing it before you leave home.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by, the Food Safety Victoria, Division of the Department of Human Services, Victoria. The Better Health Channel is part of the Department of Human Services, Victoria

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